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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001960

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SUBJECT: ANAMBRA CRISIS CONTINUES

REF: LAGOS 873

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Violence continues in Anambra state after a July 20 meeting between state government and security officials and members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). On July 22 a group of armed youth ran amok in Onitsha before moving on the Nnewi. On July 23, apparently the same group attacked and burned a police station and on July 25 they engaged in a shoot-out with soldiers in Ekwulobia. While the press continues to identify the attackers as MASSOB members, it is increasingly likely that the perpetrators are part of the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) group backed by Chris and Andy Uba that initiated the first round in this current conflict. In activity reminiscent of the attacks on the Anambra State capital of Awka in 2003, it seems that the conflict is designed to render the state ungovernable in order to force President Obasanjo to declare a state of emergency and to open up the political space for Andy or Chris Uba to emerge as governor of the state in 2007.

12. (C) After a July 20 meeting between state government and security officials and members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), it seemed that the situation would calm. The meeting, which took place in Awka, the capital of Anambra State, included Governor Peter Obi and several state government officials, representatives of the military and police, and some members of MASSOB, at least two of whom were representing former Biafra leader and head of the All Peoples Grand Alliance (APGA) Chukwuemeka Ojukwu. According to Ojukwu, the meeting resulted in an understanding among the group about the current crisis and assurances that MASSOB would remain uninvolved in the fighting taking place in Onitsha.

13. (C) In spite of this, on July 22 a group of armed youth ran amok in Onitsha before moving on the Nnewi. PolCouns saw at least six buses transporting armed youth to a section of the city just off of the main east-west highway. (NOTE: The bridge over the Niger River at Onitsha is the only bridge for miles in either direction and avoiding this community adds hours to any trip through the region. END NOTE.) The fighting that ensued was not aimed at the police in the area but rather appeared to be directed at the residents. In fact, a group of uniformed police seemed to be standing guard over the buses. PolCouns departed before the fighting began, but reports indicate that the attackers boarded the buses after about 45 minutes and departed Onitsha.

14. (C) On July 23, what seems to be the same group of armed youths attacked and burned a police station in Nnewi. Two

policemen were reported killed. Eyewitnesses describe an operation similar to that of Onitsha the day before. Six to eight buses arrived in Nnewi, hometown of Ojukwu, escorted by police vehicles. Some reports claim that the attackers had no firearms, only machetes and clubs. Others say they were armed with AK-47s. In the ensuing skirmish, the police claim that 14 suspects were released from the police station.

15. (C) On July 25, a group of hooligans attacked the residents of Ekwulobia, near Nnewi and Onitsha, where they encountered military personnel. No deaths were reported although both sides are said to have sustained casualties. At about the same time, between 12 and 15 men robbed a bank in Nnewi. Police spokesmen "lamented the amount of arms and dangerous weapons" available to the criminals.

16. (C) COMMENT: While the press continues to call the attackers MASSOB members, both Governor Obi and Ojukwu insist that MASSOB is not really involved in the destruction. They both point the finger at NARTO and Anambra political strongman Chris Uba. They claim that Uba is interested in undermining Obi's government to facilitate the election of himself or his brother, Presidential Adviser Andy Uba, as governor of Anambra state in 2007. In fact, Uba told the press that "he had ensured Obi's ascension to the governorship" after he claimed the same thing about Obi's predecessor, the PDP's Chris Ngige. Whoever is responsible, the activity reminiscent of the attacks on the Anambra State capital of Awka in 2003, when many government buildings were destroyed with the apparent complicity of the Nigerian Police Force. Whoever is behind it, it seems that this conflict is designed to render the state ungovernable, perhaps in order to force President Obasanjo to declare a state of emergency

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and to open up the political space for Andy or Chris Uba to emerge as governor of the state in 2007.
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